



# NEWS

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## **USDA ANNOUNCES PROGRAM TO PROTECT GRASSLAND**

*Harrisburg*--The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are pleased to announce the availability of \$660,000 in funding to protect grasslands within Pennsylvania through the new Grassland Reserve Program, legislated as part of the 2003 Farm Bill.

Grasslands can be protected through 30-year or permanent easements which are similar to the Farmland Preservation Program, or through rental agreements that are set up much like the Conservation Reserve Program. Easements are based on an appraisal while rental payments vary by county and range from \$7.00 per acre to \$16.50 an acre. Rental contracts can be 10, 15, 20, or 30 years in length. Haying will likely be restricted during nesting periods to protect critical wildlife habitat.

"Grazing is an important economic practice for our State's farmers," said Robin Heard, NRCS state conservationist. "We are pleased to be able to offer them an opportunity to protect those grasslands from development and provide some wildlife habitat while still allowing the farmer the ability to use that land as part of his grazing system."

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“CRP and CREP have been great programs for our Pennsylvania producers,” said Rich Pallman, FSA state executive director. “GRP offers another conservation tool for farmers and landowners who want to harvest forage by haying or grazing to manage their land.”

There is a minimum requirement of 40 contiguous acres and applications will be prioritized based on ranking criteria that will be placed on the NRCS website at <http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov>. While applications will be accepted at any time, there is an August 1, 2003, cut-off for ranking applications for FY03 funding. This will allow time for contract obligations to be completed prior to the end of the fiscal year on September 30, 2003.

For information on how you can participate in this program, contact your local USDA Service Center which can be found in the telephone book under USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or Farm Service Agency.

--3--

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